Juneteenth

Juneteenth, also known as **Juneteenth Independence Day** or **Freedom Day**, is an American holiday that commemorates the June 19, 1865, announcement of the abolition of slavery in the U.S. state of Texas, and more generally the emancipation of enslaved African Americans throughout the former Confederate States of America. Texas was the most remote of the slave states, and the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, was not enforced there until after the Confederacy collapsed. The name of the observance is a portmanteau of "June" and "nineteenth", the date of its celebration.[1][2] Juneteenth is recognized as a state holiday or special day of observance in 46 of the 50 states.[3]

Observance is primarily in local celebrations. Traditions include public readings of the Emancipation Proclamation, singing traditional songs such as "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Lift Every Voice and Sing", and reading of works by noted African-American writers such as Ralph Ellison and Maya Angelou.[4] Celebrations include rodeos, street fairs, cookouts, family reunions, park parties, historical reenactments, or Miss Juneteenth contests.[5] The Mascogos, descendants of Black Seminoles, of Coahuila, Mexico also celebrate Juneteenth.[6]

Juneteenth

Dancers at 2019 Juneteenth celebration

Also called	Freedom Day or Emancipation Day
Observed by	Residents of the United States, especially African Americans Mascogos
Type	Ethnic, historical
Significance	Emancipation of the last remaining enslaved African Americans in the Confederacy
Observances	Exploration and celebration of African-American history and heritage
Date	June 19
Next time	June 19, 2020
Frequency	Annual

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History

During the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, with an effective date of January 1, 1863. It declared that all enslaved persons in the Confederate States of America in rebellion and not in Union hands were to be freed. This excluded the five states known later as border states, which were the four "slave states" not in rebellion – Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, and Missouri – and those counties of Virginia soon to form the state of West Virginia, and also the three zones under Union occupation: the state of Tennessee, lower Louisiana, and Southeast Virginia.

More isolated geographically, Texas was not a battleground, and thus the people held there as slaves were not affected by the Emancipation Proclamation unless they escaped.[7] Planters and other slaveholders had migrated into Texas from eastern states to escape the fighting, and many brought enslaved people with them, increasing by the thousands the enslaved population in the

Ashton Villa, from whose front balcony General Order #3 was read on June 19, 1865

state at the end of the Civil War.[8] Although most enslaved people lived in rural areas, more than 1,000 resided in both Galveston and Houston by 1860, with several hundred in other large towns.[9] By 1865, there were an estimated 250,000 enslaved people in Texas.[8]

The news of General Robert E. Lee's surrender on April 9 reached Texas later in the month.[10] The Army of the Trans-Mississippi did not surrender until June 2.[8] On June 18, Union Army General Gordon Granger arrived at Galveston Island with 2,000 federal troops to occupy Texas on behalf of the federal government.[7] The following day, standing on the balcony of Galveston's Ashton Villa, Granger read aloud the contents of "General Order No. 3", announcing the total emancipation of those held as slaves:

> The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.[11]

Formerly enslaved people in Galveston rejoiced in the streets after the announcement, although in the years afterward many struggled to work through the changes against resistance of whites. The following year, freedmen organized the first of what became the annual celebration of Juneteenth in Texas.[11] In some cities African-Americans were barred from using public parks because of state-sponsored segregation of facilities. Across parts of Texas, freed people pooled their funds to purchase land to hold their celebrations, such as Houston's Emancipation Park, Mexia's Booker T. Washington Park, and Emancipation Park in Austin.[8][11]

Emancipation Day celebration in Richmond, Virginia in 1905

Although the date is sometimes referred to as the "traditional end of slavery in Texas" it was given legal status in a series of Texas Supreme Court decisions between 1868 and 1874.[12]

American & Juneteenth Flag

In the early 20th century, economic and political forces led to a decline in Juneteenth celebrations. From 1890 to 1908, Texas and all former Confederate states passed new constitutions or amendments that effectively disenfranchised black people, excluding them from the political process. White-dominated state legislatures passed Jim Crow laws imposing second-class status. The Great Depression forced many black people off farms and into the cities to find work. In these urban environments, African Americans had difficulty taking the day off to celebrate. The Second Great Migration began during World War II, when many black people migrated to the West Coast where skilled jobs in the defense industry were opening up.[13] From 1940 through

1970, in the second wave of the Great Migration, more than 5 million black people left Texas, Louisiana and other parts of the South for the North and West Coast. As historian Isabel Wilkerson writes, "The people from Texas took Juneteenth Day to Los Angeles, Oakland, Seattle, and other places they went."[14]

By the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement focused the attention of African-American youth on the struggle for racial equality and the future, but many linked these struggles to the historical struggles of their ancestors. Following the 1968 Poor People's Campaign to Washington, DC called by Rev. Ralph Abernathy, many attendees returned home and initiated Juneteenth celebrations in areas where the day was not previously celebrated.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the holiday has been more widely celebrated among African-American communities. In 1994 a group of community leaders gathered at Christian Unity Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana to work for greater national celebration of Juneteenth.[15] Expatriates have celebrated it in cities abroad, such as Paris.[16] Some US military bases in other countries sponsor celebrations, in addition to those of private groups.[16][17]

Although the holiday is still mostly unknown outside African-American communities, it has gained mainstream awareness through depictions in entertainment media, such as episodes of TV series *Atlanta* (2016)[18] and *Black-ish* (2017),[19] the latter of which featured musical numbers about the holiday by Aloe Blacc, The Roots,[20] and Fonzworth Bentley.[21][22]

Official status

In 1980, Texas was the first state to establish Juneteenth as a state holiday under legislation introduced by freshman Democratic state representative Al Edwards.[23] Juneteenth is a "partial staffing" holiday in Texas; government offices do not close but agencies may operate with reduced staff, and employees may either celebrate this holiday or substitute it with one of four "optional holidays" recognized by Texas.[24]

By 2008, nearly half of US states observed the holiday as a ceremonial observance.[7] Forty-six of the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia have recognized Juneteenth as either a state holiday or ceremonial holiday, a day of observance. The four states that do not recognize Juneteenth are Hawaii, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana.[25]

Governor Tom Wolf signing legislation to officially recognize Juneteenth in Pennsylvania

In 1996 the first legislation to recognize "Juneteenth Independence Day" was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives, H.J. Res. 195, sponsored by Barbara-Rose Collins (D-MI). In 1997 Congress recognized the day through Senate Joint Resolution 11 and House Joint Resolution 56. In 2013 the U.S. Senate passed Senate Resolution 175, acknowledging Lula Briggs Galloway (late president of the National Association of Juneteenth Lineage) who "successfully worked to bring national recognition to Juneteenth Independence Day", and the continued leadership of the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation.[26] In 2018 Apple added Juneteenth to its calendars in iOS under official US holidays.[27]

Organizations such as the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation are seeking a Congressional designation of Juneteenth as a national day of observance.[8]

See also

- 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution
- Emancipation Day
- History of African Americans in Texas
- Negro Election Day

- Serfs Emancipation Day
- Slavery in the United States

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